DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 548 CE 061 780

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TITLE Motivational Profiles of Adult Learners in Relation to Self-Directed Learning.
INSTITUTION Twente Univ., Enschede (Netherlands). Dept. of Education.
PUB DATE 15 Apr 92
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Adult Learning; *Adult Students; *Cognitive Style; Demonstration Programs; Educational Change; Foreign Countries; High School Equivalency Programs; *Learning Motivation; *Open Education; Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Netherlands

ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationship between the motives and needs of 658 adult students enrolled in a Dutch adult high school program and the curricular and instructional design of an educational reform--an open learning program. The population was all 4,442 adult learners in 3 schools who started an open learning experiment. When the students received their schedule at the beginning of the school year 1989-90, every second or third student (n=1,530) received a questionnaire. The exploratory factor analysis found that the general and social motivation profile was far more important than the instrumental profile. Respondents participated in education again because they were interested in the subjects being taught and they liked the social contacts with peers and teachers. The majority of students chose this type of adult education because of the contacts with fellow students and support from them and teachers. Although the feasibility of an open learning system depends on the desire and ability of students to design their own learning program, most students did not have this ambition and wished to rely on the support of a fixed program guided by the teachers. A major conclusion was that just implementing an open learning program as a curriculum innovation was not enough to improve adult education because of the gap between the requirements of the program and the initial needs of the students. (Appendixes include 10 references and 3 data tables.) (YLB)

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Department of Education
Division of Curriculumtechnology

Ref.: TO.21.92.281
Date: April 15, 1992

Universiteit Twente

ED348548

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MOTIVATIONAL PROFILES OF ADULT LEARNERS IN RELATION TO SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING.

Ellen van den Berg

1. Introduction

The era adult education systems deliver fixed programs seems to be over. There is a growing need for more flexible programs in a rapidly-changing, technology- complex society. The Dutch government is changing adult education policy and wants to establish a more flexible educational system. Key concept in this changing process is 'Open Learning'. Open learning is both a process which focuses on access to educational opportunities and a philosophy which makes learning more client and student centered. It is learning which allows the learner to choose how (modes of learning, e.g. lecture, seminar, independent learning) to learn, when to learn (timing, frequency, duration), where to learn (classroom, library, at home) and what to learn (learners can define what constitutes learning to them) (Cunningham, 1988, Paine, 1988).

Open learning is strongly connected with self-directed learning. Being self-directed in the learning process means taking an active role in identifying and completing learning opportunities. In other words; the learner takes primary responsibility for planning, conducting and evaluating their own learning. According to Knowles (1975) adults have a psychological need to be self-directing. This assumption is critiqued in literature. Feuer & Geber (1988) find the 'androgogy of Knowles' an oversimplification, because basically there are not so many differences between adult learning processes and that of children and the differences between adults in the degree of self-directing can be substantial. Manz & Manz (1991) discuss the matter whether the ability and desire to be a self-directed learner has to be treated as a relatively stable tendency or as an ability that can be learned. They choose for the last option and consider an effective educator of adults as the one who helps learners continuously learning on their own. Campbell (1991) adds the two types of motivational dispositions of Dweck to the discussion and proposes that performance oriented people are reinforced by the positive consequences of successful final performance and mastery oriented people are reinforced by the process of learning itself. The latter are more equipped for instructional activities which stress upon self-direction.

The central theme in this study is the relationship between the motives and needs of the learners and the curricular and instructional design of an educational reform, e.g. an open learning program. Particularly in adult education it is important establishing a good fit between the characteristics of the students and the educational program. This implies that the motivation of students to return to education and their opinion of the current program should be taken into account.

2. Context

In 1987 three schools for adult education started, sponsored by the national government, an innovation program. The schools offer a high school program for adult students, who were not able to get a high school qualification in their youth. The aim of the reform is to accomplish an open learning system which addresses more to individual needs of the students and to arrange short learning programs to reduce the gap between adult high school education and further (vocational) education or training in business and industry.

The study this paper looks at is part of a three-year evaluation study on the open learning experiment.

The main conclusions of this research project are (Van den Berg, 1991):

* A four year project is too short to implement a complex innovation as establishing an open learning program.
* There was too little financial support from the national government and the external support (training and advise) was not well organized and did not answer the needs of the project.
* The internal coordination by the steering committee and the other members of the school management was very problematic, because of underestimating the difficulty of a change process in a large school organization with much part-time faculty.

Although these problems were important reasons why the project did not reach its target, the problem was that the open learning project did not analyse and taking into account the entry behaviours of the student population

In the next sections we elaborate on this proposition.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research objectives and instrumentation

Three research objectives were defined:

a. to discover through an exploratory factor analysis of motivation items, the underlying dimensions to participate in an adult education program;
b. to determine the reasons why students choose for the adult high school program the experimental schools offer;
c. to obtain the opinions of the students about some characteristics of traditional instruction and open learning.

Addressing the research objectives a questionnaire was constructed based upon a previous instrument (Doets, 1988). The questionnaire consists of three main parts. The first part included items representing background variables (age, sex, previous reached educational level) which would allow us to characterize different types of learners. The second part consists of items about motives to return to education. The third part consists of items about features of open learning and "traditional" learning. The items in the second and third part were formatted into 5-points Likert-type items.

3.1 Sampling

The population of this study was defined as all adult learners (4442) in the three schools who started an open learning experiment and were enroled in the adult high school program. A random sample of 1530 students was drawn. The response was 43% (=658).

Comparing some characteristics of this sample with national statistics showed that the division between women and men in the sample is comparable to the national statistics. The mean age in the sample is slightly younger.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

When the students received their schedule at the beginning of the school year 1989/1990 every second or third student received a questionnaire. Because of logistic considerations it was not possible to send the questionnaire to their home address.

Survey data were coded and entered as a SPSS data set. After descriptive statistics had been computed for all variables, the following data analysis procedures were implemented. In an attempt to discover the underlying dimensions of motivation of adult learners to return to education the 34 motivation items were subjected to factor analyses. Based on the examination of the total factor analysis a 2-factor orthogonal solution (with the loading criterion set at .40) was selected. Taken together, these factors accounted for 29% of the variance in the original items. Cronbach's α was computed on the items loading on the factors; the Cronbachs α for factor 1 was .88 and for factor 2 .74.

The items of the features of open learning and of traditional instruction were analyzed by frequency tables. For reason of easy interpretation the original 5-points Likert-type items were recoded to 3-points items.

4. Results

4.1 General motivational profiles

Table 1 presents the results of the exploratory factor analysis. The factor solution consisted of two factors. The first factor is comprised of items which refer to a general and social motivation to learn. The items comprising the second factor all relate to a more instrumental motivation; learning to get a better job and making further education possible. Taken together, these factors accounted for 29% of the variance in the original items.

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insert table 1 about here

The factor solution of this study do not represent as many motivational profiles as reported in literature (Doets, 1988, Beder & Valentine, 1989). An explanation for this is that the population in this study was more homogeneous than in the other studies.
The general and social motivation profile is far more important than the instrumental profile. The respondents participate in education again because they are interested in the subjects being taught and they like the social contacts with peers and teachers.
The instrumental profile only consisted of items referring to job and educational advancement, the items referring to family responsibility did not reach the criterion level for factor loadings set at .40.

4.2 Specific motives

Table 2 shows the frequencies of the specific motives why the students attended this type of adult education. Adult students do have an alternative for attaining a high school qualification in correspondence education courses. However these courses are not supported by the government and therefore quite expensive.

Insert table 2 about here

The majority of the students chose for this type of adult education because of the contacts with fellow-students and the support they got from them and teachers. For these students learning as a social process seemed to be very important.

4.3 Features of open learning and traditional instruction

Table 3 presents the appreciation of the students of some elements of open learning and traditional instruction.

Insert table 3 about here

The feasibility of an open learning system depends on the desire and ability of students to design their own learning program. The results in table 3 show that most students do not have this ambition, they wish to rely upon the support of a fixed program guided by the teachers.

Three explanations can be formulated to these results.

Firstly, people tend to appreciate things they are familiar with (e.g. traditional instruction) more than the unknown (e.g. open learning).

Secondly, a major group respondents started with the educational program again after a long period without formal education. They might be uncertain and rely upon the support and guidance from teachers and peers.

Also, an important point is that many learners returned to education because they were interested in social interactions; self-directed learning does not fit with this motivational profile.

5. Discussion and implications

This study provide some insight in the motivations of adult learners leading to participation in a particular adult education program. The policy of the school board is to implement an open learning system which requires an attitude of the students which is highly self-directed. From our study we can conclude that the participants do not rate themselves as self-directed learners. Although in a sense the most important general motivational profile can be characterised as mastery oriented, most of the students do not want to take the responsibility to path their learning process individually. Rather an opposite attitude is the dominant picture; the adult students in our study prefer a fairly fixed program, with much guidance of teachers. They do not evaluate themselves as independent learners; they highly appreciate the support of and contacts with other students.

We may conclude that just implementing an open learning program as a curriculum innovation is not enough to improve adult education, because of the gap between the requirements of the program and the initial needs of the students. It is extremely important in designing and developing an open learning program to bear in mind that one of the goals of the program has to be to teach the students the skills and attitudes to become self-directed learners. Because "open learning won't work, until learners learn how to learn" (Cunningham, 1988).

Grow (1991) developed the Staged Self-Directed Learning Model, in which he distinguishes four learning stages: dependend learners; interested learners, involved learners and self-directed learners. According to Grow (1991) it is the task of a teacher to match the learners stage of self-direction and prepare the learners to advance to higher stages in altering his/her teaching role from an authority coach to a guide; from a guide to a facilitator and from a facilitator to a consultant. With the altering of roles the teaching method too must change from highly teacher-centered activities to highly student-centered activities.

In designing an innovative open learning program a clamour of attention has to be paid on the creation of learning environments in which the development and capabilities toward self-direction can be encouraged.

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Table 1: Motivations of Adult High School Students: Factor Solution after Varimax Rotation, and Frequencies

	Loading	Freq %
Factor 1: General and Social Motivation		
I enjoy learning	.58	76
I want to know something about a particular subject	.62	67
I want to improve my general knowledge	.60	87
I want to have contacts with other people	.67	67
I did not have the opportunity to learn when I was young	.40	23
I go to school as a leisure activity	.60	54
I want to be informed about society	.66	51
I like to think things over	.77	67
I am bored with my life	.60	31
I am curious about knowledge	.77	68
I want to have more confidence in myself	.63	60
I am interested in the community	.74	48
Factor 2: Instrumental motivation		
I need a qualification for further education	.52	57
I want another job	.69	26
I want to improve my changes on paid work	.61	30
I want to make a promotion in my company	.47	10
I am not happy in my job anymore	.50	17
I want to change my professional qualification	.53	17
I am advised to learn again by my employer	.40	7

Table 2: Motives for this particular type of adult education

	Freq. %
It is more fun than distance education	80
You can talk about the content of the course	80
Contacts with fellow students	75
You can talk with other people about your experiences	72
You do not have to do it alone	72
You can study together with other people	70
Good study guidance of teachers	61
It is not expensive	54
I did not know another possibility	20

N = 658

Table 3: Appreciation some elements of 'open learning' and 'traditional instruction'.

	+	+/-	-
OPEN LEARNING			
Written study suggestions	60	29	11
Computer assisted instruction	21	30	49
Selfdecision about the moment of taking a test	21	23	56
To study more at home and less classroom instruction	5	11	85
To have more choices in taking a course in a school year	10	28	63
TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTION			
Teacher centered instruction in classrooms	89	8	3
A fixed programm during the school year	73	20	7
Teachers emphasizing the main points	73	16	11
Study harder before a classroom test	55	27	19
More classroom instruction	15	15	70